

N.Z. EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Trentham Military Camp  
Tuesday 21.9.1915

Dear Nellie

It was very pleasant this evening to come in and find your nice long letter. It was also pleasant to learn that you were all well. Although I am not quite rid of my cold I am feeling A.1.

Since Saturday and including Sunday morning my company has been engaged in rifle practices. Quite a change from ordinary drill and much more interesting. I finished my practice this morning and this afternoon was in the butts in charge of a squad of markers. I had practically nothing to do. Just to see that things went on alright. I had expected to be engaged on similar duty tomorrow but on returning to the hut tonight I found that one of the chaps had been sent to the hospital with measles. Consequently our hut has been quarantined and we are not allowed to go out. The place has been thoroughly fumigated and if in the morning no more cases are found I expect the restrictions will be raised.

I understand that we are to shift camp to Tauherenikau next Thursday so you may depend I do not want to be confined to my bungalow for three or four days, and I don't expect to. We are to march about sixteen miles of the way to the new camp the rest will be by train. If the weather remains as it is now, fine, the march should not be bad at all. I expect we will be busy for some days after arrival getting used to the new camp and new conditions.

I received a shock when in your previous letter I read that Alec Rimmer had been killed. I wired the Rimmers my sympathy and a couple of days ago received from Lilla Rimmer a letter acknowledging same. However she said that they had received no news beyond that Alec was missing. She thought that perhaps there was still a ray of hope for his safebeing. I sincerely hope that this may be realised. He was a very fine chap. The other day I got another shock. When looking at the pictures in the Auckland Weekly News I noticed a photo of an old familiar face; underneath I read: Trooper J.E. Walkley: Killed. I used to stay with him at Mrs Hills at Palm. N. Dad will perhaps remember meeting him at Halcombe with a couple of other chaps who were motor cycling back to Palmerston. He went to Egypt about the same time as Norman Monteith did. The last time I saw him was one night when I biked in from Longburn to Palmerston N. It doesn't seem very long ago but a great deal has happened since then.

A more cheerful topic now, eh? You will find the telephone very handy in many ways I'm sure. About those photos: I went into town on Friday night but found the photographers studio closed. There is one feature of the proofs with which I am not quite satisfied and if this cannot be remedied I may sit again. Anyhow, I'll send some photos as soon as I can get them fixed up. The dream which you told about was very extraordinary but please don't cry about it as I'm certain I couldn't dream of anything so

impossible. Well Nellie this morning I was awake at 5.30 a.m. and up a few minutes later. Besides one or two little jobs I have yet to shave. I am feeling rather sleepy now, as you can understand, so think I will say goodnight.

Love to all  
from  
Your loving brother  
Bertie.

P.S. Have just learned definitely that we are to go to Tauherenikau on Thursday. Same a/d: only "Tauherenikau Camp" instead of "Trentham" will find me.

#### TAUHERENIKAU MILITARY CAMP

Y.M.C.A.  
Field Service  
October 24th 1915

Dear Mother,

I am again back at the camp and once more am getting into the old stride. The first day or so after my return seemed "rotten." However plenty of work keeps one's mind occupied and I suppose helps one to settle down. They are pushing us on with the training and I understand that next Thursday we commence our march back to Trentham where we complete our shooting practice. I have also heard that either Nov 6th or 13th will be the date of our sailing. Time's flying, eh? The sooner I am on the way now the better pleased I'll be.

Upon arrival at Frankton last Wednesday I walked down to Hamilton and later returned to Frankton by train. I went to Aunt Maggie's for an hour but did not see her as she was out somewhere. I was sorry I missed her. However after bidding the household goodbye I caught the Express at 3 p.m. At Taumarunui I was looking out of the window when who should come along but Don McLennan. We were both very surprised and had a busy chat until the train drew out. Arriving at Palmerston a little after three next morning I went to a hotel and had a few hours sleep. During the morning I looked up some old chums and at about 11.30 a.m. caught the Wairarapa train, reaching Masterton a little after 3 p.m. I went round to Dixons where I spent two and a half pleasant hours. I was just in time for a tennis set. I took a few photos copies of which I will send to you later. Left Masterton about six reaching Featherston about an hour later. Thence to camp per motor car. Thus my final leave ended.

Things seemed very rough for a start but as I have already told you I am settling down again. Since being back up to tonight the weather has been very hot but rain started this evening and is falling as I write. On Saturday morning we had a route march to beyond Greytown and back, a distance of about eleven miles. We returned in time for dinner and in the afternoon were inoculated. This afternoon I went for a walk with a couple of chums. I have been to a church

service in the YMCA marquee where I am now (9.30 p.m.) writing.

Well, Mum, the bugles have sounded the first post so I suppose I must get back to my tent now. About those photos at Bartletts if you post me the proofs please I will be able to order copies. Bartletts are at present very busy so in order to get photos before I sail I will have to order early. I should shortly get prints of photos I took at home and of course will send you copies straight away. Well dear Mum time is limited so I will have to wish you goodnight.

Love to all  
from  
Your affect son  
Bertie

Note in Bert Henson's handwriting on an envelope containing the following letter: A letter from my father to me at Trentham just before I sailed for overseas. Nov 1915. Rediscovered when going through some old papers and photographs Sunday p.m. 14th Feb 1971:-

Te Kowhai  
Nov 2nd/15

Dear Bertie

Nellie is writing to you tonight, so I will take the opportunity of sending you a few lines. My old fingers are pretty stiff, but I will try to scribble a bit.

I suppose it will not be many days now before you will be taking your departure from your native land. I therefore take this last chance, before you leave, of extending to you the blessing of an affectionate father; and may the blessing of our Heavenly Father rest upon you, and may He protect you from all harm throughout your long journey and through all the dangers of war and may you be returned to us as sound and well as you are today. You may depend upon it that our thoughts will be ever with you.

I expect that you are now back at Trentham; we saw in our "Advocate" that the 8th had marched from the Wairarapa camp, over the Rimutaka and back to Trentham and that a lot of the men got very footsore and weary. I am sure it would be a very trying march, especially if it was bad weather. We have had very changeable weather all along since you were here and things have not been too pleasant in the yards. We will write to you pretty often and hope you will write to us as often as you can make it convenient.

I expect Nellie has told you all the news, so I will not attempt to do so. Once more I wish you a hearty goodby and a safe and speedy return.

Your affectionate father  
Herbert Henson [Written on back of photo of

"reinforcement camp - 1915 Trentham]

Trentham

Wednesday 3/11/15 (hut marked with pencil

is where I reside)

Dear Mother,

This card is just to let you know that I am still alive and well.

I sincerely trust it finds you all same. You will see by above heading that I have now changed my place of abode. Had a splendid march over the Rimutakas. I received your M. Order and don't know how to thank you. You really should not have sent all that amount. However I trust to be able to repay you soon. We sail next Saturday week 13th. Am sure you must all be very busy

up there. Haven't yet received photos from Hamilton but have written about them. Space limited. Will write tomorrow.

Best love to all from  
Bertie

N.Z. EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Trentham Military Camp  
Nov 4th 1915

Dear Mother,

I suppose you received my postcard yesterday. I wrote after returning at about a quarter to ten from a splendid concert which was given by Wellington talent in the YMCA hall here. I didn't have time to write a letter. Even now I don't think I have very much news to tell you. I suppose you will have read about our march over the Rimutakas, so won't elaborate on that journey here. I came through the test splendidly. Had a good pair of boots -- a most important part. I can assure you that marching up the hill with a heavy pack on one's back was rather warm work. There was practically no breeze, the sun pretty strong and we were all perspiring like shearers going at top speed. This did us no harm however and I am now pleased that we marched instead of entraining. It is something to the credit of the 8th Reinforcement. I am sending you a little paper, the "Camp Courier." It is printed locally and in it you will find a description of the march. Dear Mum. I received your letter and M.O. before I left Tauherenikau and must thank you most sincerely for the present. I really didn't need it but of course just now it will come in very useful. You must take it out of my allotment which I have made payable to Dad.

About the leather waistcoat. I understand we are to be presented with one by the Ladies Patriotic Committee before leaving NZ -- so that solves one problem. Very good isn't it. The other day I received my ships kit which is the final issue here. It included a good pair of canvas and leather shoes for use on board ship and a good balaclava cap and a pair of mittens for use in colder parts. Also received an extra uniform. So you see I am fairly well fitted out now.

Since being down here I have been into Wellington twice, last Sunday and Tuesday. Expect to get leave again tomorrow night when I will probably go to Lower Hutt. Have received letters from both Uncle John and Aunt Florrie enquiring about date of my sailing. They hope to get to Wellington that day which will be next Saturday week 13th inst.

The last two days have been occupied in completing our shooting course which is now finished. I did fairly well, having qualified as a first class shot. I am sending some of the photos I have taken. Some of them are not very good but of course one must gain experience to be proficient. The cause of delay on the part of Grays of Hamilton was, they said, on account of not having my full address. I have not yet received the other photos from Bartletts but if I go into town tomorrow night I will see about them. Well Mum there is another concert tonight in the YMCA which I want to go to. I have yet to have a shave and as the time is now after seven p.m. I think I must conclude and post

this.

Best love to you all  
from Your affectionate son  
Bertie

[postcard]

Troopship Willochra  
Lyttelton  
2.30 p.m. 14 Nov 1915

My dear Father, Am writing this on the boat deck. Had an extremely smooth passage down last night. Didn't have slightest sensation of sickness. Arrived here about 8 a.m. this day. At about 10.45 a.m. entrained to Chch. Church parade Chester Square. Great reception. Returned about 2 o'clock. Troops have just now finished embarking. As I write crowds are waiting at entrance to wharf to gain admittance (here they come now 2.38 p.m.). Weather has been beautiful all through. Uncle Sam and Aunt Florrie saw me off. Was given two tins of cake etc. Will leave that for later on. The other transport, Tofua, is on the other side wharf (crowds are now surging in, throwing fruit to chaps swarming on ship's side). Will drop this into crowd to get posted. Hope you receive it alright.

Love to all.  
Goodbye  
From Bertie

(Post card)

Albany, W.A. 26/11/15

My Dear Father, After a splendid trip from Hobart where we called for a day, we are now at Albany. I had five hours ashore at Hobart, a peaceful little place. Am having 4 1/2 hours ashore here. This is only a small town, rather barren and very hot. And talk about flies; they're thick. We are now getting nearer the line. I am enjoying good health. Trust this finds you all likewise. Am risking whether this gets past censor. You will get some photos I have taken - later. Love from your affectionate son, Bertie

HMNZ Transport No 26

Steaming thro' Red Sea  
Thursday Dec 16th 1915

My dear Dad,

I am now getting near the end of my journey to Egypt. We should arrive at Suez about Sunday morning; thence we go by rail to Cairo. The mail in which this letter will go will be returned from Suez so its receipt will intimate our safe arrival there. I sincerely trust it finds you all well.

I suppose you will have received the postcards I posted at Albany, also the photographs which I left with a chemist there to be fixed up and returned to you. I have since taken a number of snapshots which should be of interest to you. I don't think I will be able to send any this mail as it closes at 5 p.m. this afternoon and I won't have time to get them fixed up. A day or so ago it was intimated that the mail would close at 9 a.m. Saturday, but this morning we were notified that this time had been altered, slipping me up rather. However I will send the

photos back from camp in Egypt where I will have more conveniences for fixing them up.

Leaving Albany at about 6 p.m. on Nov 27th we have since had a really splendid trip. The weather has been on its best behaviour, likewise the "briny." Of course we have had some very warm days but one is bound to get them when passing through the tropics. On Friday, Dec 10th, at about 1 a.m. we crossed the equator, and that afternoon Father Neptune made his appearance and held his "court." The proceedings caused a great deal of fun. The officers were the chief victims. I managed to secure a few snapshots of the fun.

On December 1st I was vaccinated for smallpox. I felt no ill effects of this until about a week later when my arm began to cause me considerable discomfort. Then for three or four days I had rather a bad time. However I am pleased to say that I am quite well again now and am feeling A.1. The lymph took rather well in me owing to my having not been vaccinated before. If vaccination is an effective safeguard against smallpox I am pretty sure I'm safe from at least that disease.

Upon getting up on the morning of Monday the 13th inst we were greeted with the sight of land - - Cape Guadafia the northeastern portion of Africa near the entrance to the Gulf of Asia -- the first land we had seen since leaving Albany. You can imagine it was rather cheering. Later in the morning I witnessed a very remarkable sight -- that of a great school of porpoises. There were hundreds of them leaping out of the water at once. They were swimming at right angles to our route and the boat cut through the centre of the shoal. I took a couple of snapshots of them. Land faded out of sight about noon. Our course then lay across the Gulf to Aden where we arrived next day about 11.30 a.m. We went to the anchorage but did not even drop anchor. A tug came out and took off the mails from our boat also from the Tofua and we were again on our way to Suez in about an hour's time. Aden is a great rock, very barren.

Perhaps you will remember Norman Monteith mentioning this fact in a letter to Nellie. I can, and now I've seen it for myself. I wonder how Norman is? Would like to hear of him. Trust he is alright.

After leaving Aden the coast of Arabia was in sight until nightfall. About 8 p.m. we passed the island of Ferim a naval station. Of course it was dark then (days and nights being pretty well equal in the tropics) and nothing much more than the lighthouse and other lights could be seen. Next morning, that is yesterday, we passed numerous rocky islets all absolutely barren. Today as I write we are cutting through the Red Sea, no land in sight. The sky is clear and the sun very strong despite the fact that it is winter here now. It's pretty warm.

Since the warm weather came on I have cut down my denim trousers and converted them into shorts. These, a shirt, shoes and sox, are any amount warm enough. I have been sleeping upon deck lately. Rather better than in the cabin. I was almost forgetting to mention that we [were] passing a good deal of shipping as we crossed the Gulf of Aden. From Albany to the Gulf we had passed almost no shipping, only one or two boats just after leaving the

former port. We have not been able to do much drill on board on account of the limited space available. To relieve the monotony there has been a sports tournament also numerous concerts in the evenings.

On the whole the food has been pretty good although potatoes have been a very rotten lot. Fresh water has not been available in great quantities. A man is allowed one fresh water wash per day. Then there are salt water baths which are not very cleansing. Clothes are washed on certain days when fresh water is provided for the purpose.

Since leaving Albany we have been cut off from the outside world. No war news. I wonder how things are going. Anyhow we will soon be on land now. One thing that impresses me greatly is the supremacy of the British on sea. Our boats sail these seas unescorted just as if nothing in the way of war is occurring. It's splendid!

I suppose you will be pretty busy on the farm now. I trust everything is going well. Christmas is now near at hand. It will be over long before this reaches you. I'm pleased that I will spend it on land. I have not heard where we are to go to after leaving Egypt but suppose we will spend at least six weeks in that country.

Well Dad, I don't think I will be able to write much more just now. I will have to parade shortly and I think I told you before the mail box closes at 5 p.m. this afternoon. I will write from Egypt giving you further details of the journey also hope to print out the photographs. I am very pleased I brought the little camera with me. I must now conclude and post this.

Love to you all from  
Your affectionate son  
Bertie

HMNZT NO 35 ("Willochra")

At Anchor in Stream, Suez

3 p.m. Sunday, Dec 19th 1915

My dear Mother,

You will receive perhaps with this, a letter I wrote last Thursday, but having a little time to myself, I thought I would drop you another short note. As you will see by the above I am still on the boat. We arrived here about noon yesterday but contrary to what we had expected in the morning did not disembark in the afternoon. This I expect was due to the fact that there was not sufficient room for us to berth at the wharf. The Tofua, the other NZ transport went along side at about 8 a.m. this morning and I suppose by this time the men will have all disembarked. The wharf where she is berthed at, is about a mile distant from our anchorage in the stream, and when looking at her through a pair of binoculars about an hour ago I could not see any soldiers aboard and I concluded that they must have landed. There are four or five other transports, Australian I think, at the wharf so I suppose that as soon as one of these gets rid of its load of men and stores, room will be made and our turn will come to disembark.

Then there is the train service to be taken into consideration. It will take a little time to transport by rail all of the different troops at present here. There is a rumour rife about another expected Turkish attack on the canal, also trouble with the natives in Egypt. It is said that we will remain somewhere near the canal to cope with the attack, also that we may be in action within a fortnight. Please remember that this is only rumour. There is most probably not an atom of foundation to it. One hears so many rumours aboard one does not know what the morrow may bring forth, and furthermore one doesn't worry much about it. You might think this strange, but really it doesn't trouble me in the least. It would relieve the monotony of things.

I had a glance at an Egyptian paper this morning but did not notice anything about the eastern theatre more than a piece about the probability of Greece being attacked by Bulgaria. I would very much like to know how things stand. Have not seen any other newspaper since leaving Albany. However suppose will get the news when we get ashore. That should be tomorrow. This life is a grand uncertainty in the manner of events. I have already told you we are about a mile from shore. We are just about that distance from the entrance to the canal. From here we can see the town ahead of us, the railway running to the port, and then the port itself near the canal entrance. Near the latter yesterday were three battleships. One of these I watched going up the canal this morning. I have seen quite a lot of boats going up and down. They seem to go up in the morning the south bound ones coming down in the afternoon. I don't know whether this is a rule to which they adhere. To us on board it almost appears as if they are sailing through the sand. There is a good deal of shipping here at present, amongst which, other than the transports at the wharf, is an Indian troopship on one side of us and an Australian transport on the other.

The country around here is very sandy and desert-like. To the north and south of us there are hills in the distance. It is now just about mid-winter here and the weather is quite pleasant. The sun is a little strong in the middle of the day but the nights are not unlike those one might experience in N.Z.

This morning natives came off in the boats selling fruit and cigarettes etc. Cigarettes are not

allowed to be smoked on board. So these fellows' visit was hastened to an end by the officers who told them to get out.

Since Friday morning I have been engaged in mess-orderly duties which consist of the serving out of the food to the men at meal times. The men for this work are appointed each week. My turn came near the end of the voyage so I will not have quite a week of it. In one way I am not very keen on the work but yet it fills in time.

Since starting to write this I have heard that we are to go alongside the wharf at 9.30 a.m. tomorrow. I'm not sorry. One gets tired of the boat.

I wonder how much of the letter I wrote a few days ago has been deleted by the Censor. The latter person won't see this as I will send it by someone on the boat staff. My arm which was vaccinated is, with the exception of the usual scab quite right again and I am feeling very well. I sincerely trust this finds

you enjoying the best of health. I don't think there is much more news just now. I will write again soon.

Fondest love to you all,  
From your affectionate son  
Bertie

Y.M.C.A.  
8th Re'fts  
Zeitoun Camp  
Christmas  
25/12/15

My Dear Mother,

Christmas Day! and I am here in Zeitoun Camp, Egypt. I have just been picturing in my mind my surroundings this time last Xmas. You will remember that I came through from Stratford on the motor. I trust that you will all have enjoyed a very happy Xmas. As for myself -- well not quite the best of times has been enjoyed by me today. Not nearly as good as this day last year. Notwithstanding this, I am in excellent spirits and I might add enjoying the best of health.

On Sunday night Nov [sic] 19th I wrote you a short note and together with my rough notes despatched it back to you. At about 6.45 a.m. next morning the Tofua came out from the wharf and dropped anchor in the stream, after which, at about 8 a.m. we berthed at the space recently occupied by her.

The artillery disembarked early in the afternoon, but B Company did not disembark until about 5 p.m. We entrained in the carriages which were waiting on the wharf and at 6 p.m. we bade farewell to the old Willochra which had borne us in safety for about 11,000 miles, and the train

with its load of soldiers commenced its run to Zeitoun. It was a beautiful moonlight evening quite cool and very similar to a fine N.Z. evening. We could see the Suez Canal from the railway for the first few miles. At the first and several other subsequent stops the train was besieged by scores of natives selling fruit, cigarettes etc. The native police were kept pretty busy in their attempt to keep them off. They used their sticks freely but the dagoes would run back again the next moment. These Arabs always ask double or treble the amount of the value of their goods and quite expect to be beaten down. We were previously put wise to this. I was disappointed that we did not make the journey in daylight. However as I have already said the night was beautifully moonlight and I got a very good idea of the country. It is for the most part desert, but very fertile where irrigated.

We arrived at Zeitoun and then backed into Holmich [?] siding about 1 a.m. on Tuesday morning. We detrained there and quietly marched up to our part of the camp about half a mile distance. We were given coffee and biscuits after which we retired to the huts allotted us. We were very tired and were glad to lie down on the sand and get some sleep. We had our overcoats on but the night was pretty chilly and I did not sleep much. Next day we had nothing to do except get our kits sorted out and have a look round. In the afternoon I went by train into Cairo a run of about 20 minutes. Dave Woodhead was with me. In town we met

some Australian chaps and had a good look round. Cairo is a big city (about 700,000 people). It has some very fine parts and some very squalid parts too. I can assure you that you are quite justified in believing anything bad you hear about this city. I haven't time now to tell you very much about the place but more anon. I returned to camp about 9 o'clock that evening. I went to Heliopolis and then on to Cairo by electric tram. Thursday evening. Returned to camp early and took the negatives in to have prints taken off them but regret they will not be finished in time for this mail. Will send them by next week's mail.

I have had very hard luck this Christmas. One of the fellows in the hut has gone to the hospital with measles. Consequently we have all been quarantined in the hut and I understand will remain so for a day or two. Really rotten luck but suppose one has to grin and bear it. For dinner we had duck, chicken, peas and cabbages, not very well got up and cooked. Had I been able to go into town I would have had a good dinner at one of the hotels, but that couldn't be done. One has to learn to make the best of things here.

The huts we occupy are flimsy wooden structures. There is practically no rainfall here and they are made more as a shelter from sun. If we had a N.Z. shower we would get flooded out. There are no bunks provided. One has to make his bed on the sand which I can assure you is pretty loose and dusty. I have bought (for 3 piastres) a mat made of bulrush -- similar to raupo. This helps to keep the blankets out of the dust. Most of the chaps who have been here any time use a kind of wicker bed which the natives make and sell. I will get one as soon as I can find an Arab with one for sale.

Sunday 26.12.15. Last night I saw Willie Cuff. He is here in the 7th Mounteds and is getting on fine. Josh Cuff is in the Artillery and has been over on the Peninsular [sic]. Bill said he expected him back any day now. As soon as I am allowed out I must look up a lot of old chums here. I now expect we will be here for some time yet. It's hard to say of course. The papers here

contain little news regarding the war. You learn much more out there.

Well Mum the mail closes at 9 a.m. this morning so I will now conclude and get this away. I will write again this week and will send you a few photos. I trust this finds you all enjoying the best of health. Love to all

from  
your affectionate son  
Bertie

Don't know whether Norman Monteith is in camp here but as soon as possible will try to find out. It will be decent if he is here!

Zeitoun M Camp  
Egypt  
Jany 2nd 1915 (sic) [1916]

Dear Nellie,

I cannot express to you how pleased I was to receive, last night, your letter of 21.11.15. Letters are something to which one looks forward and the receipt of them affords great cheer.

I am now getting quite used to this place. When I first arrived here it seemed hard to realise that I was actually in Egypt; but one soon gets into the run of things and feels more at home.

In my last letter I think I told you that I spent the Christmas in quarantine on account of some of the others catching measles. Well this quarantine has just been lifted today. A most unfortunate time for the sickness to happen but I trust next Xmas will be a little brighter.

Despite the restrictions regarding quarantine I am afraid we did not all adhere to the regulations. A fellow would be very conscientious if he did at Xmas time.

Yesterday afternoon I went out to the pyramids with a chum. On the way out in the tram we met four Australian chaps and we made a decent little party. We had a good look around. We went inside the pyramid of Cheops to the chamber where the King Cheops was buried. Also visited the Sphinx and the temple of the same name. The pyramids are really wonderful. How the ancients managed to raise blocks of stone weighing up to about 42 tons is really great. Had my photo taken out there. It should follow in next week's mail.

I have been into Cairo a number of times now. One soon gets tired of the city itself but there is a lot to be seen in the environs. I think we will be here for some time yet, in which case I will be

able to have a very good look around. I am sending a small album of views of Cairo also a few copies of snapshots I took on the voyage over. I trust you will find them interesting. Will send more later.

I have met a number of old chums here including Russell of Johnsons [?] Another chum Aston of Eltham has just called around for me. The last time I saw him was in Chch. So I must ask you to excuse shortness of note this time. Will write during this week. I trust this finds you all well - that Mum is feeling better. I suppose by the time this reaches you Gordon and Leslie will be back at school again. School days were good days. Write as often as you can.

Love to all  
from your affectionate brother  
Bertie

Have not yet come across Norman Monteith. Am trying to dig him up.

Zeitoun M Camp  
Egypt  
Jan 7th 1916

My Dear Mother,

I am still at the above address and enjoying good health. I tell you this first as I expect it is what you want to know chiefly. I trust you are all well at home. Time flies -- it is now a week into the New Year - by the time this reaches you it will be about six weeks. During the Xmas and New Year things in connection with drill were rather lax but we are now getting into a good swing with our further training. We go out on to the desert for

drill and I can assure you we all have any amount of grit now. Sand everywhere in ears, eyes, mouth, clothes, but somehow one gets used to it, or at least makes the best of things. We have some good shower baths handy, where one can refresh oneself after a good day's toil. After the salt water on the boat one can appreciate the fresh. Before reaching here the water undergos boiling, and it is generally quite warm.

The weather here for the last week has been cool, the last three or four days especially so. Fellows who have returned say it has been very cold on Gallipoli -- too cool for New Zealanders. You will have read much more about the evacuation of certain parts of the peninsular than I have. It is pretty certain we won't be sent over there. I won't be very sorry on this score as the returned chaps don't recommend it as a nice place to reside.

I suppose by this time you will have seen Norman Monteith. The other night I found out where the Vets were camped and in the evening went along to look him up. Of course I did not know whether I would find him there as before leaving New Zealand I understood he had gone over to the peninsular and since then I had learned nothing further of him. In the first tent I went to I

found some chaps who knew him. You can imagine my disappointment when they told me that he had returned by the Willochra on her last trip. I had missed him. They told me he had been in the hospital and was pretty run down. He perhaps left here the same day I arrived (Tuesday Dec 21st). Anyhow he will now be on the water and I expect you will have seen him ere this reaches you. I sincerely trust he regains his health quickly. He had over a year in this part and must have got very tired of it. Won't Aunt Maggie be pleased at his return! She will have received word of his coming and I can imagine how happy and excited she would be when she learnt the news. It will not now be necessary for me to attempt to describe Egypt to you. Norman will be able to do that much better than I can. Tell him a chap who said his nickname was "curly" told me about his return. For Norman's information -- Curly and a couple of others were sitting in their tent (second from road near mineral factory when I poked my head in the tent. They said they had just been talking about him. I expect Norman can picture the scene well. Perhaps he will be trying to forget Egypt.

I think I told Nellie I had been to the pyramids. Since then I haven't been anywhere much except for a brief visit to four mosques near the Citadel. I was accompanied by a chum and we had a great time. The mosques are really wonderful buildings inside. I was very much struck with the Mosque of the Refaiya. Its interior was beautiful.

First of all I must tell you that upon our arrival near the mosques we were accosted by a native who offered to show us around for the small sum of 5 piastres (a piastre being worth about 2 1/2d. This was equal to about 1s 0 1/2d in our money). We agreed and he forthwith took us in tow. We first visited the Refaiya Mosque. Before entering we had to put slippers over our boots and then after paying 1 piastre for this the road was clear. We soon discovered that our guide's knowledge of the English language was rather limited so we had to depend on our

own power of observation. He led around to two other mosques, Ibrahim Agha and another small one, the name of which I don't remember. At the last one to which he took us there was an incident. This was the mosque of Sultan Hassan and it is not now used as a place of worship. Many years ago it had been used as a barracks for soldiers but it is now a show mosque - that is for sightseers. Well we got inside and commenced looking around when we noticed another Arab addressing our guide who was hanging his head in a very guilty manner. The new fellow informed us that the native who had been showing us around was not a guide but (this in a disgusted kind of voice) merely a donkey boy! Furthermore he suggested that we should pay and dismiss the donkey boy and that he (the new fellow) being a highly qualified guide should show us around. We did so, as we thought that this fellow being able to speak English would be able to tell us more about the place. We thought it a great joke being "had" by a donkey boy. Each guide must have a licence and we had omitted to ask him to show his.

The new guide was funny. He would gabble off a lot about a certain part of the mosque. We would catch as much of this as we could and then perhaps ask him if he meant so and so. He would answer "Zackly" (meaning exactly) and then hunching his shoulders and striding off with a long springy step say to us "Dis way blease." This seemed to be his repertoire. I'm sure he must have said this millions of times before.

On the outside walls of this mosque we were shown holes made by the cannon of Napoleon

when he occupied Cairo; in one hole there actually remained an old cannon ball. At the finish our guide praised himself up and asked if we did not agree with him! He then informed us his fee was five piastres. Then we finished with "Mahomet the Rogue", walked down the street, caught a tram back to the town from where we took the train back to Helarich [?], the station near the camp.

The natives here are continually on the look-out for "baksheesh." Even the native conductor on the tram asked if he might keep part of the change for himself! They are great "cadgers." Last night I went to a concert given to the soldiers and held in the "Tivoli", a big open-air theatre in the camp actually used as a picture show. There was some splendid talent present. Amongst the contributors to the programme was H.R.H. Prince Alexander of Battenburg (songs), lord Paget (songs), and Mr Huntly Wright, the well known London actor. There were lots of others, including several ladies. I quite enjoyed the evening.

The other day I was just wondering if the Defence Dept were paying to you my allotment of three shilling per day. If not, it would be just as well for Dad to communicate with them. Regarding the photos; I left a list of addresses with Bartletts and gave Aunt Florrie the money to pay for balance of them. I expect though, that you will have received them alright. I suppose that things will be fairly busy on the farm now.

Well, Mum, I am writing this in the YMCA hut and it is now nearing 9 p.m. and my chum Aston has just asked me to go along with him for something to eat. This is too tempting so I will now conclude with love to all

Your affectionate son  
Bertie

Zeitoun M' Camp  
Egypt  
Jany 14th 1916

Dear Nellie,

I have, just about half an hour ago received your letter of Dec 5th. I was sorry to learn that Mum was still unwell but of course your letter was written nearly six weeks ago and I trust that she is well again long ere this.

I can sympathise with Katie in regard to her visit to the dentist. I have spent a good few hours in the chair and know pretty well what it is like.

You must have been experiencing very bad weather to have only two fine Sundays out of eighteen. As I think I have told you before the rainfall here is very slight. There have been only three or four showers since I have been here and this is winter. It has been rather cold the last

few days but one doesn't mind that much. Work will counter that. It must be very warm in the summer time. I don't think I would care to be here then. The 8th landed here at really the best time of the year.

We are still busy at drill, route marches etc. Often when out on the dusty desert, absolutely devoid of any vegetation, I think of the green fertile fields of N.Z. In comparison with this part of the world, one can realise to a greater extent the natural advantages it (NZ) has. I remember at one time reading the prediction of some wiseacre. He said that if the forests of NZ continued to be cut down at the present rate and not be replaced, the country would in time become similar to Persia in rainfall. If he is right I can recommend NZ to grow trees for all it is worth!

Last Sunday, together with a couple of chums I visited the Citadel, the old-time fort of the City. Here there is a good deal of interest to be seen. A very fine mosque and Jacob's well called for a good deal of attention. The latter is a shaft about 500ft deep. A stairway cut into the rock round the sides of the well enabled us to get down 300ft. The next 200ft down to the water level is a much narrower shaft. I believe one can get right down to the water, but we didn't bother. Before Cairo had its proper water supply system I understand this old well supplied a big quantity of water. It is now in disuse.

Tea time has intervened. I had to go across to get something for the inner man and then returned to the YMCA hut without a pen; so have to resort to pencil. You say that Aunt Maggie was beginning to think that Norman was amongst the missing. Won't she be relieved when she learns that he is returning.

We are kept fairly busy at drill etc. Aeroplanes are a common sight here. They fly all over the camp. The other day I saw four up at once. At first the sight of an aeroplane was rather novel, but it is marvellous how these things become commonplace.

I am forwarding you and Katie a small keepsake each. The work is Egyptian and is gold inlaid on steel. I might have sent you something more but one has to watch the cash. I trust you receive them alright. Well, Nellie, I don't think there is much more to tell you just now. Nothing startling since I last wrote. Trust this finds all well.

from With love  
Bertie

[letter written on three post cards of scenes around Cairo:]

Zeitoun                      M'                      Camp  
18/2/16

Dear Nellie,

Last week together with the card I received your nice long newsy letter. I was pleased to learn that you were all well. I am still at the above ad but it is probable we will be moving to another camp shortly. Things are going along just the same. I am enjoying splendid health. The weather is splendid. The 9th are now here. They say they had a splendid trip across.

You asked me how I enjoyed Xmas. Well I suppose you will have received my letters telling of the bright time I had. I suppose the photos you mentioned you had received were the ones I got developed and printed at Albany. Did the photos of the crowd at the wharf at Wellington and Lyttelton come out well? You can get albums for the small photos. They are thus kept in order. Some of the snaps I have taken should enlarge to p.c. size very well. Under separate cover I am sending you a few more. I trust they reach you safely. I have heard of some cases where photos had been taken out of the envelopes en route. I hope this is not the case with any I have sent. I still keep "snapping." It is very interesting. The other day I came across Charlie Eichler in camp. He has been over here some time. Has also been on the peninsular [sic]. I am anxious to hear how Norman Monteith is getting on. Trust he is back to good health again. He will be able to tell you all about this part of the world. The foremost and highest pyramid on Card No 2 is Cheops. I have been to the top and have taken some snaps. Suppose by the time this reaches you things will be slackening off a bit. I will shortly send you all the negatives I have taken up to date. If you want more copies you could get a printing frame and take some prints off yourself. It would be good experience, eh! Regarding Mum's very kind offer to send me some money. Many thanks but think I'll be able to get along alright. Will probably soon be in a new training camp where we won't be able to spend so much. Trust Grandma and Aunt Hettie are again enjoying good health. Love to all from

Bertie (Writing next week)

Zeitoun M Camp  
Egypt

Feb 8th 1916

Dear Nellie,

Last week I left my letter-writing to be done towards its end but the unexpected - a trip to Suez - intervened and I consequently missed the mail which closes on Friday nights. I will make sure of catching it this time. I trust this finds you all enjoying

the best of health.

It is seven weeks today since I landed here. This time seems to have slipped by very quickly. Being kept fairly busy at drill etc and occupying my available spare time in looking around and seeing as much of the place as I can helps to spin the weeks by. Soon after arrival here, or at least after New Year, things assumed a certain routine in camp life and they're practically sailing along in the same old groove still. Of course as the time goes on I am seeing and learning more of this part of the globe.

The 8th Reinforcements are now under the command of Major Saunders - vice Capt Ross.

A week ago tonight I went into Cairo and upon returning about 9 p.m. was informed that together with 99 others of B Company I was to be ready at 6.15 am next morning to go away "somewhere." Right enough we were ready. We received rations for 48 hours, 100 rounds of ball cartridge each, and then marched off to a small station about a mile from here and near the

camel camp. There we found about 300 Egyptian reservists under guard of body of Australians. These reservists I believe had been recently called up and had struck for more pay. I also heard that some of their men were supposed to have been in communication with the enemy.

Our job was to escort them on the train down to Suez. While waiting to entrain I witnessed a very revolting sight, the flogging of two of these men for some offence. Their backs were bared and they were held down by their shoulders and feet to the ground while the wielder of the lash, an Egyptian soldier, administered the punishment. Each blow of the lash cut into the flesh and drew blood while the poor beggars writhed and yelled with pain. The punishment was very severe, one fellow receiving twenty-five lashes.

At about nine o'clock all being right we commenced our run to Suez. I think when telling you about my trip from Suez to camp on Dec 20 I said I regretted it was made at night. Well, I have had this little grievance (?) remedied and have seen the country by daylight. The train travelled very slowly and we did not reach the camp at Suez until about 5 p.m. There we were relieved of responsibility regarding the prisoners. The camp there was occupied by English, Indian and Newfoundland troops. That night we had a brief look around Suez. We slept in the carriages which had been left in the camp siding. Pretty well all night through they were shunted about all over the place. However, in the morning found ourselves back at the siding. I had another look around the town, which I might add isn't much of a place (I took a few snapshots) and about noon we left for Zeitoun. The line, for a good part of the way runs close to the canal upon which we could see the shipping. The journey was monotonous, the train very slow.

At a small station near the canal I saw no one less than Joe Adams. The train did not stop and I shouted out to him and managed to attract his attention. I got a surprise and he apparently received the same. I think he must be out there on outpost work. We did not arrive back to camp until 10 p.m.

that night. The distance I believe is just about 109 miles.

About a fortnight ago we (the 8th Reinforcements) were inspected by General Birdwood. Suppose you will have been informed of this by the papers. Last Monday week we went for a route march to Cairo and back, a tramp of about 19 miles. Last Sunday afternoon with a couple of chums I visited the Cairo Museum of Antiquities. One could spend a great deal of time here but we did not have a great deal of time at our disposal and were able to have only a brief look around. I intend going again. There is a great deal to be seen here.

During the last two or three weeks we have had several falls of rain but otherwise days have been pretty warm, with cold nights. The days will now continue to get warmer, but I do not expect we will spend the summer here, although it is probable we will not go away for a while yet. Of course this is only surmise. We don't know.

A mail is expected in a day or two so I will probably receive a letter from you by it. I am finishing this after dinner on Friday 11th. It is now nearing "fall in" time and the mail closes at 7 p.m. this evening so I will now have to conclude with best love to all.

From your affectionate brother  
Bertie